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## Opponent in race for Stanislaus Sheriff calls new gun policy 'flip-flop'

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Sheriff Adam Christianson's announcement Monday to a pro-gun group that he'll grant more concealed weapons permits is an election-season flip-flop meant to win votes, challenger Rob Jackson said Tuesday.

Also Tuesday, police chiefs throughout Stanislaus County expressed little concern with the sheriff's sudden policy change, which was featured on the National Rifle Association's Web site.

"I kind of question his timing on this," said Jackson, a Turlock police captain who worked 20 years for the Sheriff's Department. He noted friction between the sheriff and the Madison Society as reported in the April 4 Bee, based on the group's perception that Christianson was stingy with concealed weapons permits.

Christianson did an about-face at a Madison Society meeting Monday and signed a pledge reading, in part: "As sheriff, self-protection shall always constitute good cause for the issuance of a permit to carry a concealed weapon."

"I think 'flip-flop' is appropriate," Jackson said, "when he makes such a dramatic change in the middle of a political campaign."

The sheriff on Monday explained his concern at having to lay off deputies because of budget cuts at a time when state rules require early release of tens of thousands of inmates from prisons and county jails.

"It probably wouldn't be a bad thing to have a few more guns on the streets in the hands of law-abiding citizens," Christianson said at the meeting. He could not be reached Tuesday for comment.

State law grants the sheriff authority to license people anywhere in the county, including cities with their own police departments. Five of nine cities in Stanislaus County have their own departments; the other four contract with Christianson's agency for law enforcement.

Among the five independent cities, Ceres doesn't issue permits, asking Christianson to handle requests within that city. The remaining four chiefs received no warning about Christianson's about-face — but didn't need one, most said.

"I'm sure he has a reason for it," said Oakdale Chief Marty West.

Newman Chief Adam McGill said, "It's his department and his business. I'm not going to comment one way or another."

Modesto Chief Mike Harden said he has "a very good relationship with the sheriff" and "wouldn't feel comfortable (commenting) unless I heard from him."

Turlock Chief Gary Hampton said, "It's pretty clear this whole concealed weapons permit issue has become a topic of debate relative to the pending election for sheriff. I'm just not going to weigh in on it."

Jackson took over as acting chief when Hampton was on vacation last week, but has no part in Turlock's permit process, which has drawn accusations of political favoritism because two of the seven licensees are city councilmen.

Jackson refused to sign the pledge when he addressed the Madison Society last month. He said he would convene a committee, including gun enthusiasts, to establish a clearer standard for the vague clause in California law allowing law enforcement executives wide latitude in determining good cause for a permit.



Sheriff Adam Christianson is seen at the Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department, Monday, April 12, 2010. (Brian Ramsay/bramsay@modbee.com) - Modesto Bee - Brian Ramsay

Even before Christianson's policy change, he was handing out more gun permits to city residents than were their chiefs. The exception is Newman, where McGill has licensed two people and Christianson only one, according to 2009 numbers.

In Modesto, 71 people last year had gun permits through police compared with 127 through the Sheriff's Department. Oakdale police granted eight, compared with 19 given to Oakdale residents by Christianson. And in Turlock, Hampton had granted seven compared with 52 licensed by the sheriff.

Ceres Police Chief Art de Werk said permits were handled by Wyoming state officials when he worked there, removing all accusations of cronyism that sometimes haunt agencies in California.

"So it's not based on personal relationships there," de Werk said. "I favor that more standardized approach. That's why I entered into an arrangement with the sheriff's office probably 10 years ago."

As for Christianson's policy change, de Werk said: "That's his business. He knows the law."

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